

Spark: Kansas City Supply Chain

Everyone connected to America's supply chain knows how tight it's being pulled. That may present short-term headaches for those who have to manage their way through it, but lurking behind those day-to-day challenges are longer-term personnel issues that could present unforeseen risk to your company.

They run an HR gamut from potential harm to your corporate culture to your compensation structures, talent acquisition, and onboarding processes. All are strands in a web that will influence your ability to acquire materials, process them and ship product to those indispensable to your business success: Your customers.

Dissecting each of those risks, and more, was the mission for a panel of experts in the supply-chain and HR world who deliberated in July for dozens of keenly interested executives and managers in logistics-related industries. Their discussion at Boulevard Brewing Co. provided insights into challenges—some readily visible, some not so apparent—confronting organizations reliant on supply-chain efficiencies.

Chris Gutierrez, President of KC Smartport, moderated the discussion, drawing on the thought leadership of Shane McFeeley, Lead Researcher at Omaha-based Quantum Workplace; Jordan Brunk, Chief Marketing Officer for Warehouse Quote; and Larry Wigger, Professor of Supply Chain at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Gutierrez got the ball rolling by noting the effect

SPARK Kansas City—Supply Chain is a networking group created to “spark” local supply chain discussions that can make a difference. SPARK events are held two to three times annually (Spring, Summer, Fall) and include panel discussions on a different topic each session. **SPARK's purpose is to provide a forum for small and medium business owners/leaders in the Greater Kansas City area to discuss strategy and best practices for supply chain optimization.**

Subject matter experts from academia, industry, and the public sector (including municipal, state, and federal government resources) serve as panelists to share their thoughts on subjects that are topical for supply chain focused executives. SPARK's focus is to foster collaboration to help companies find new or unexpected ways around supply chain challenges including improvements to business processes and innovative use of technology. Please check out the next event!

of the pandemic on the supply-chain work force. While office workers by the millions were quickly set up to work from remote locations, the supply-chain labor pool stayed on the job and experienced enormous stresses trying to keep vital parts of the economy working.

But to operate effectively, especially under such circumstances, manufacturing and distribution companies need to maintain staff competencies through a culture that is laser focused on retention efforts, McFeeley said. That issue is more acute



Chris Gutierrez
CEO, KC Smartport



Shane McFeeley
Lead Researcher,
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Larry Wigger
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Jordan Brunk
Chief Marketing Officer,
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than ever as we move toward a post-pandemic economy. A national labor pool wracked by Baby Boomer retirements, younger workers job-hopping for better wages, or those making career shifts for more satisfying work—all are converging to erode the talent base of companies that aren't safeguarding their cultures.

“Retention,” McFeeley said, “is increasingly an issue as more options and job openings continue to be available” to supply-chain workers.

Global factors, too, are creating peril, said Wigger. “We're at peak global population—and rising” as Third World nations become more developed and consumption focused. Immigration, as well, will reshape the work force. And hard lessons learned about single-sourcing of raw materials will compel company leadership and purchasing managers to expand their supply chains, minimizing the threat that key suppliers may be out of commission.

The concept of Just in Time (JIT) shipping, said Brunk, devolved to ‘Just in Case’ ordering, creating more demand for storage space and straining operations. But even that is morphing into a mindset of ‘Just Get It’, with the potential to disrupt materials acquisition strategies in efforts to secure supply.

Among the take-aways for many in the audience was that companies will need better discipline with what they're willing to pay to fill gaps in their labor—as handsome bonuses and higher wages to attract newcomers can have a cancerous effect on culture as longer-term employees chafe over perceived inequities. Investment in the creation of a resilient culture based in open communication was a consensus best bet for actions to take now.



Managing through such challenges will likely be the order of the day for quite some time, panelists said.

As Gutierrez noted, “there is a lot happening in the KC market, across automotive, food manufacturing and distribution, plastics, and other areas. Unfortunately, the uncertainty we are experiencing is going to continue.”

“Everyone wants that crystal ball: When are we going to turn the corner?” Wigger said. “Unfortunately, history and some current systemic issues make that impossible to know.”

For information on the next SPARK gathering, contact Doug Borcharding at dborcharding@meridianbusiness.com or watch for information at www.meridianbusiness.com/resources/webinars-events

